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INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
RUEHRC/DEPT OF AGRICULTURE USD FAS WASHINGTON DC
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RUEHGO/AMEMBASSY RANGOON PRIORITY 0380
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UNCLAS KOLKATA 000028

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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DEPT PLEASE PASS HHS AND CDC

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KFLU](#) [EAGR](#) [TBIO](#) [CASC](#) [AMED](#) [SENV](#) [IN](#)

SUBJECT: AI IN WEST BENGAL SITREP - 9: JANUARY 24: NO NEW DISTRICTS
REPORT AI INFECTION

REF: A) KOLKATA 0027 B) KOLKATA 0026 C) KOLKATA 0024 AND PREVIOUS

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: On January 24, for the first time in several days no new districts in West Bengal, beyond the present nine, reported cases of AI infection. The Kolkata city government implemented measures to block poultry from entering the city. However, no restriction on poultry consumption was imposed. In the rural areas, authorities continued with their culling, albeit at a slower than planned rate. This largest of India's H5N1 outbreaks so far will have a serious adverse impact on the economic condition in West Bengal's poor rural communities. No new districts reporting AI is a positive turn, which may give the GOWB an opportunity to better manage the AI outbreak if the lull persists. End Summary.

¶2. (U) With the H5N1 virus appearing at Balagarh (Hugli district), approximately 50 miles from Kolkata, the state Animal Resource Department (ARD) alerted Kolkata's municipal authorities to monitor AI in the city. Roads leading into the city are being watched in an attempt to prevent poultry from affected areas entering Kolkata. The Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) has inspected major poultry markets but has not issued any advisory curbing poultry consumption.

¶3. (U) In a positive turn, on January 24, there was no report of H5N1 virus spreading to new areas in West Bengal beyond the presently affected nine districts. Culling teams have started to fan out to more rural villages, but culling figures are still way below the GOWB's 2.2 million in seven days target. ARD teams have arrived in Cooch Behar in North Bengal, which reported the presence of H5N1 on January 23. However, culling will not start until January 25. Kolkata's National Institute of Cholera and Enteric Diseases (NICED) laboratory has received no/no additional human samples beyond the five samples that tested H5N1 negative/negative on January 23.

¶4. (U) On the basis of confirmed cases, this AI outbreak is the largest of the outbreaks in India so far. Nine districts in W. Bengal are affected: an area totaling nearly 36,476 sq. km and requiring the projected culling of at least 2.2 million birds. In comparison, the Maharashtra outbreak (February 2006) involved culling 1.3 million birds over 16,700 sq. km and the Manipur outbreak (July, 2007) involved culling 90,000 birds over 315 sq. km.

¶5. (U) Even as ARD officials cope with the immediate culling challenges, killing at least 2.2 million poultry will cause a

severe blow to West Bengal's rural economy. For example, in the nine affected blocks of Birbhum district, 40 percent of the 1.5 million people live below the poverty line - on less than two dollars a day. Backyard poultries, often organized through women's self-help groups, are used to generate additional income for such families. A typical backyard poultry would raise 10-20 chickens, earning an additional Rs 2,000 (USD 50) per year for the family. Under the GOWB compensation scheme, of only Rs. 30 for broiler and Rs. 40 for laying chicken, these women are now left with a one-time payment of Rs. 800 or approximately USD 20.

16. (SBU) Comment: No new W. Bengal districts reporting confirmed cases of AI is a positive turn in the outbreak. Over the past week, AI infections were reported in new districts daily. If this lull in infections persists, GOWB officials may be able to begin managing the outbreak. The GOI appears to be helping address some of the initial organizational problems in the culling, such as providing additional manpower from other states to support the culling teams, providing more protective equipment and helping to some extent with increasing awareness. However, some fundamental problems do persist: the number of culling teams is still not sufficient for the culling targets, villagers are still unwilling in areas to cooperate and the are unhappy with the level of compensation, and public awareness or understanding about the risks of AI is still relatively low.

JARDINE